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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000206

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [QA](#) [XF](#)

SUBJECT: QATARI MFA DOES NOT WANT NATO/ISAF TO BECOME A  
BILATERAL CRISIS

REF: A. USNATO 113

[1](#)B. USNATO 117

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b) and (c)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Qatari Deputy Minister for Follow-Up Affairs Mohamad al-Rumaihi told Ambassador and DCM February 25 that U.S. personnel supporting the NATO/ISAF Afghanistan mission out of Al-Udeid Air Base are covered by the bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement. He nevertheless complained that Qatar was never formally notified that these activities had begun, either by NATO or by member countries participating in ISAF. He asked for some formal notification from the U.S. that there are U.S. personnel assigned to Al-Udeid in support of the ISAF mission. Al-Rumaihi was keen to keep Qatari frustrations with negotiations on a Qatar-NATO agreement from affecting U.S.-Qatar bilateral relations. End summary.

[1](#)2. (S) In a lengthy meeting February 25, Ambassador told Deputy Minister for Follow-Up Affairs Mohamad al-Rumaihi that an order for all NATO personnel to leave Qatar would pose a very serious threat to U.S.-Qatar bilateral relations. Washington would not see this simply as complication in efforts to negotiate a NATO-Qatar SOFA but as a strong negative indicator of Qatar's reliability as a U.S. ally. News that Qatar might expel U.S. forces, even the small number supporting NATO's Afghanistan operation, will be received very poorly and likely regarded as a violation of the U.S.-Qatar Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) and the Al-Udeid Implementing Agreement.

[1](#)3. (S) Ambassador explained that he had raised the issue February 24 with Sheikh Jabor bin Yusef, the Foreign Minister's office director, who said that the U.S., as the dominant member of NATO, could simply pressure NATO to come to agreement with Qatar. Ambassador replied that Washington would see this not as NATO's problem but as evidence that Qatar is not a dependable security partner for the U.S.

[1](#)4. (S) Al-Rumaihi said Qatar did not wish this issue to affect the Qatar-U.S. bilateral relationship. But he did not seem to fully understand that an order such as that contained in the February 21, 2007 diplomatic note from the Qatari Embassy in Brussels stating that the presence of NATO personnel in Al-Udeid Air Base is "illegal" might be interpreted as applying to U.S. personnel currently supporting the NATO mission.

[1](#)5. (S) Al-Rumaihi made clear to Ambassador that "your people are no problem. They are covered by (by the DCA) and need not be expelled." He nevertheless complained repeatedly that NATO had begun operations here without ever notifying the GOQ. He said that it was consistent with the DCA that Qatar

be notified of any use of Al-Udeid Air Base for operations against a third party. It had long been understood that U.S. forces would use Al-Udeid for operations in Afghanistan and Somalia, but when NATO took over Afghanistan operations, Qatar was never notified, creating the potential for embarrassment to Qatar and legal ambiguities should a service member from a NATO country get into trouble in Qatar. (Asked about his earlier argument that these operations left Qatar vulnerable to retaliation by Al-Qaida or the Taliban, al-Rumaihi said that this might be "three or five percent of the reason" for Qatar's current position, but the real issue is sovereignty.)

¶6. (S) Al-Rumaihi said it was reasonable for the U.S. (and other countries supporting the ISAF mission) to provide some form of bilateral government-to-government notification, ideally in the form of a letter to the Heir Apparent and de facto Defense Minister, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, or to the Foreign Minister. The letter, he said, need not name the particular U.S. personnel supporting ISAF ("that could be waived," he said) but simply state that a certain number of U.S. personnel are assigned to Al-Udeid Air Base to support NATO operations in Afghanistan and that the U.S. considers these personnel under the jurisdiction of the bilateral U.S.-Qatar DCA.

¶7. (S) When Ambassador asked if the letter from General Craddock to the Qatari Armed Forces Chief of Staff Hamad al-Attiyeh satisfied that notification requirement, al-Rumaihi said he still had not seen it. (Note: Al-Rumaihi said this despite his earlier comment to DCM that he had been briefed on the letter and was unhappy with the contents.) Ambassador provided a copy of the letter to Al-Rumaihi who,

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following a quick read, complained that the letter was from the NATO military commander, a "technocrat" without the authority to speak for NATO policymakers. He also predicted that the six months General Craddock had requested would pass with nothing happening.

¶8. (S) Al-Rumaihi was asked for clarity on two issues: First, assuming this is not resolved by March 4, is Qatar telling us that U.S. personnel supporting the ISAF mission must depart? And second, is Qatar telling us that actual combat missions in Afghanistan flown out of Al-Udeid Air Base must also stop on that date? Al-Rumaihi asked us to wait until March 1 to give him a chance to engage the Foreign Minister on this matter. He also said that QAF Chief of International Cooperation Brigadier Abdullah Juma'an al-Hamad and Khalifa Alsowaidi of the European and American Affairs Directorate at the Qatari MFA are traveling to Brussels for meetings with NATO on February 28 and those discussions could yield progress. (Note: In a February 24 conversation with DATT, BG Abdullah maintained his hard line on NATO operations and the non-applicability of bilateral DCAs but suggested that the issue could be resolved during his upcoming trip to Brussels.)

¶9. (S) COMMENT: The Qataris are still annoyed that they have never been formally notified that NATO missions in Afghanistan would be flown out of their territory. Further, he said the QAF had consistently convinced the Amir and Heir Apparent that a NATO agreement was within reach so had deferred any confrontation over NATO's continued presence without formal notification. When this notification never came, and the agreement was never concluded, the QAF lost face and led them to take their current hard line. This appears to be driving Qatari policy, even more than a desire for deeper cooperation with NATO or security guarantees.

¶10. (S) COMMENT, CONTINUED: At the same time, there appears to be a fair amount of confusion and disagreement on the issue within the GOQ and between the MFA and the Qatari Armed Forces. Neither, it seems, may have imagined that this could lead to a major bilateral dispute with the U.S. Al-Rumaihi

suggested at the end of the meeting that he would recommend to his Foreign Minister that Qatar seek ways to disentangle the NATO negotiations from our bilateral military relationship. As for Qatar's desire for formal notification, Embassy Doha believes the Qataris would be satisfied with a generic letter stating that some number of U.S. personnel - without naming them - are assigned periodically to the CAOC to support NATO/ISAF operations in Afghanistan and that we consider those personnel to be fully covered by the terms of the bilateral U.S.-Qatar DCA.

UNTERMEYER